DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 234 835 JC 830 433

AUTHOR Konrad, Abram G.
TITLE Issues in Institutional Evaluation.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Colleges; Educational Administration; *Evaluation Methods; Foreign Countries; *Information Utilization; *Institutional Evaluation; Postsecondary Education; *Self Evaluation (Groups)
IDENTIFIERS *Canada

ABSTRACT

As Canadian colleges face clientele shifts, stabilization of staffing, increasing emphases on nontraditional programs and delivery systems, and changing job markets for graduates--all within a context of escalating costs and inflation--educational leaders are under increasing pressure to develop meaningful approaches to institutional evaluation. Four inter-related issues in institutional evaluation warrant particular consideration: (1) Who has authority for initiating institutional evaluation? (2) Why is evaluation undertaken? (3) What procedures should be utilized in conducting evaluations? and (4) What happens to the results of the evaluation? A review of the literature and experiences in other countries suggests that the most successful evaluation systems are characterized by institutional authority in establishing the system of evaluation; improvement and renewal as the primary purposes of evaluation; multiple and ongoing data collection and validation procedures; and openness and trust in the shared ownership of evaluation results. Institutional evaluation can play a significant role in the continuous development of Canada's colleges, and it is in the best interests of everyone concerned to ensure that it does. (LL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED234835

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A. G. Konrad

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ISSUES IN INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION

Abram G. Konrad*

University of Alberta

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

> The same flexibility and adaptiveness that we seek for society as a whole are essential for the organizations within the society. A society made up of arteriosclerotic organizations cannot renew itself. (John W. Gardner, Self-Renewal)

The context of postsecondary education differs markedly today from that of a decade ago. Shifts in clientele, stabilization of staffing, nontraditional programs and delivery systems, and changing job markets for graduates in an era of escalating costs and inflation increase the demands for accountability. Unanticipated environmental and political pressures underscore the need for efficient use of resources to achieve greater institutional effectiveness. Whereas change traditionally accompanied institutional growth and development, in a period of relative stabilization it results primarily from deliberate choice to engage in self-renewal activities.

Across the breadth of this country, the United States and elsewhere, educational leaders face mounting pressures to develop meaningful approaches to evaluation. Unfortunately, as Robert

---

*Coordinator of the Centre for the Study of Postsecondary Education and Professor of Educational Administration at the University of Alberta.

JC 830 433

Burns reminded us, most people do not see themselves as others see them, and educational leaders are no exception. From the fairy tale we recall that what we see in the "mirror on the wall" is not necessarily a true reflection of ourselves, but rather the image that we would like to see. On a personal level, we have generally accepted the Socratic aphorism, "An unexamined life is not worth living," but it's another matter when we adopt an institutional perspective. Would an appropriate corollary in this discussion be: "An unexamined institution is not worth instituting"?

A postsecondary institution, like other organizations, acquires a life of its own, according to Arns and Poland (1980:73), but characterized by considerable inertia, it "maybe slow to respond to changing conditions. From time to time, it is helpful to step back and examine the fundamental assumptions upon which the institution is based." Institutional evaluation provides the occasion for such an examination.

While many issues in institutional evaluation warrant our consideration, this paper identifies just four. That these are complementary and inter-related will become evident as we discuss them.

1. Authority: Who initiates institutional evaluation?

Education in Canada is a provincial responsibility; departments of government establish regulations and policies for the operation of educational institutions. Although trustee boards exercise institutional authority for colleges and

universities in most provinces, all postsecondary institutions report to departments of government. Governmental involvement in program review and approval has increased in recent years, both in Canada and the United States.

In discussing current developments in accreditation of higher education at the 1981 annual meeting of the American Association for Higher Education in Washington, D.C., Richard Millard (1981:9), President of the Council on Postsecondary Education, warned against greater involvement of government in institutional quality assessment and enhancement. In his view, "either state or federal approaches tend to be by law and regulation with the end result being rigidity and loss of flexibility." Furthermore, according to Kells (1980b:8), an externally stimulated evaluation might readily "generate anxiety and defensiveness" within any institution. In particular, Macpherson (1979) concluded that institutions could not reasonably be expected to support a process designed to uncover weaknesses, and therefore increase the probability of external criticism.

Similarily, Grant Fisher (1979:45) concluded, "Like U.S. counterparts, most Canadian postsecondary institutions smart at the thought of "imposed" evaluation. The attitude that, if there must be formal evaluation, "we'll do it ourselves" seems to predominate." It's a long-standing tradition in postsecondary education that the community itself must accept the challenge of quality assessment and improvement through self-regulatory activities.

Fraser (1979:38), describing the countervailing forces at work within the college system in British Columbia, reached the conclusion that the evaluation process should be institutionally centered:

> The pull between unfettered responsiveness to perceived constituencies and limitations imposed by central planning agencies is of permanent concern to educators in virtually all postsecondary jurisdictions. The balance of these forces must be perceived in the field to allow educators sufficient freedom to promote and develop new ideas according to their own professional judgment of society's needs and of the appropriate methods of achieving results. A centralized model for review of educational results would, in the view of the Ministry, contribute excessively to the negative side of the balance sheet.

Reviewing the role of state-level boards in quality assessment, Miller (1980:412) also argued for a "balancing act between required and reasonable state-level accountability and evaluation efforts and those that go beyond what is required and reasonable and what is desirable in terms of optional institutional autonomy and flexibility."

Institutional evaluation that grows out of an institution's own commitment to quality has a greater chance of success than when it is imposed from the outside. In an analysis of successful and unsuccessful evaluation processes, Kells and Kirkwood (1979) determined that the degree to which the process was perceived as springing from and being responsive to institutional needs rather than to an outside agency was critical. When the principle of self-regulation was operative in postsecondary institutions, the evaluation processes were both more acceptable and more

effective. Who exercises authority for institutional evaluation will directly influence the process and its outcomes.

2. Purposes: Why is evaluation undertaken?

The purposes served by institutional evaluation relate closely to the locus of authority for evaluation. Quite simplistically, if authority resides with government, the primary purpose of evaluation is institutional accountability; if authority derives from a professional association, the purpose is primarily one of accreditation; and if authority is institutionally based, growth and improvement are the primary purposes. Of course, an evaluation often serves more than one purpose.

Accreditation among institutions in the United States currently focuses on two concerns, according to Young (1979:134):

> . . . educational quality, defined and interpreted within the context of an institution or program's statement of its own scope and purpose as compared with similar institutions and programs; and institutional integrity, viewed from the perspective that the institution or program is what is says it is and does what it says it does educationally at any given point in time.

When evaluation is conducted as part of an accreditation process, the results may be primarily of interest to the accreditating agency. In the context of public postsecondary institutions in Canada, evalution may serve primarily as the basis for institutional growth and improvement. In the view of Fraser (1979:38-39), the review format "provides fertile ground for a wide variety of constructive changes."

To effect change, institutional evaluation, according to Kells (1972:145), must be designed "to proceed substantially

beyond rote description to analysis and problem solving." The intention of the process must be to attach meaning to the description and to focus upon "current problems and opportunities." In describing an alternative model for self-study, Kells (1977:341) proposed new forms that foster institutional improvement.

> The new forms often use topical and problem-oriented approaches or integrate self-study activities with a planning process. They require extensive participation by faculty and staff members and focus on solving real problems on campus. They strive to institutionalize processes of in-house research, the results of which will help in decision-making and institutional improvement.

Arns and Poland (1980:65) agreed that the emphasis in evaluation should be upon improvement, "nothing more and nothing less."

Evaluation provides information about an institution that can serve as the basis for planning and development. Concomitantly, evaluation also serves educative and unifying purposes within an institution as well as within a system (Dressel, 1971). Innovative progams, nontraditional delivery mechanisms, and diverse institutions must first be understood before they can be improved or modified. Institutional evaluation could play a significant role in the development and improvement of Canada's postsecondary systems.

3. Procedure: How should evaluation be conducted?

Kipling wrote, "There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal laws, and-every-single-one-of-them-is-right." Evaluation approaches should be tailored to specific institutions. Since others have provided comprehensive descriptions of how to conduct institutional evaluation (British

Columbia, 1979; Dressel, 1976; Kells, 1980; King, 1979; Miller, 1979), this paper examines selected issues related to evaluation procedures.

Most regional accreditating associations suggest that a relationship exists between institutional quality and criteria for institutional objectives, educational programs, financial resources, faculty, and learning resources. According to Troutt (1979), research does not substantiate the claim that these criteria assure institutional quality. A linear model of evaluation that focuses upon inputs, processes, and outcomes provides a basis for collecting important information about an institution, but it may not serve adequately to judge an institution's capacity for dynamic, flexible functioning or its capacity to survive (Kells, 1980b). A process-oriented model, with its primary emphasis upon renewal (Konrad and Small, 1979), may serve more effectively in providing the basis for institutional growth and improvement.

A second procedural factor has to do with data collection and analysis. Clearly, a comprehensive evaluation must draw upon various data sources. Unfortunately, few institutions maintain on-going data files on qualitative measures. Greater efforts should be made to develop data bases to serve evaluation purposes. Measurement cannot necessarily be applied to some of the most important aspects of educational institutions. Objective data should be used where available and purposeful, but no apologies should be made for using subjective data. As Miller (1980:425) said, "It is better to be generally right than

precisely wrong." Evaluative judgments go beyond mere measurement; they add meaning to data profiles and go beyond descriptive information to analytical problem solving.

External teams function in institutional evaluation primarily to verify that standards of good practice have been met and to stimulate institutional improvement. Kells (1976:25) found that no more than one-third of the team visits in 200 reviews proved to be noticeably helpful to the institution involved. He attributed this failure in large measure to "the discouraging naivete and lack of confidence exhibited by most faculty members and administrators on the campus." He explained:

> The overwhelming reluctance to accept any kind of peer review or to participate with outsiders in the discussion of problems and opportunities blots out the potential for improvement from self-study and team visits. The concern over possible "failure" promotes "spit and polish" activities to such an extent that useful reactions and data are not acquired and, in most cases, no useful product results.

What is needed to improve the participation of institutional members and external teams in the evaluation process is systematic orientation and training. Fraser (1979:38) argued that "wide involvement of the institution's members in the process enhances the likelihood of constructive response to proposed change." Training activities are essential for institutional members as well as external team members to achieve competence in evaluative analyses that help an institution in its planning and renewal activities. Kells (1972:147) suggested that team visits could be conducted most appropriately "during the last stages of the planning or other processes employed during the implementation phase to sustain momentum and spur new programs."

Dressel (1971:280) added that a longer delay between the self-study and the team visit "would make it possible to consider the impact rather than simply the quality of the self-study."

To further increase the impact of external teams in the evaluation process, it might be advisable to develop an inter-provincial approach to institutional evaluation. The likelihood of bias in a team decreases as members are drawn from a wider geographical region, preferably not from competing institutions within close proximity to the institution under review. The professional growth benefits of such a venture would clearly outweigh the additional costs incurred. Perhaps Canada is ready for the development of regional cooperation in institutional evaluation.

4. Ownership: What happens to the results?

Institutional evaluation can become another ritual unless the results are used effectively. How the results are used depends in part on the climate surrounding the evaluation. According to Romine (1971), trust is a vital condition underlying postsecondary education. Arns and Poland (1980:67) also opted for openness in conduction reviews, encouraging "communication among the parties at all times" and requiring "feedback at each stage" of the process.

It is not unusual for institutional members to feel defensive in review activities, but when a climate of trust has been established it will be possible to be honest about "the emperor's new clothes." Faculty members and administrators alike

should feel that their views have been heard and understood throughout the process. Furthermore, everyone should develop a sense of ownership of the process as well as the evaluation report. Care must be taken to avoid a "linear" or hierarchical app.oach where data are passed "upward" but never heard about again. Both data "senders" and "receivers" should be able to use evaluation results in seeking institutional improvement.

In Dressel's (1971:287) view, institutional evaluation is wasted effort "unless it serves as an agent of change." Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for evaluation reports to be treated confidentially and "shelved." Kells (1980b:82) maintained that an "open process should be followed by an open report." And, he concluded, "a process that results in recommendations but no action has failed." To ensure that appropriate action would follow, an evaluation should include what Kells called an "agenda for action," or what Arns and Poland (1980) referred to as the "Memorandum of Understanding." The plan of action should specify items to be implemented by priority and by whom, items that need consideration in the governance scheme and by whom, and areas for further study and by whom. A follow-up on findings and recommendations were an integral part of Camosun College's institutional evaluation, according to Fisher (1979:49): "Early in the evaluation, the college staff received assurance from the administration that recommendations coming from the evaluation would be systematically tracked for at least a year." And Miller (1980:426) asserted that the process should also include a plan for evaluating the evaluation.

An institutional evaluation is not likely to be productive, according to Dressel (1971:279), "unless it is a part of a periodic review or continuous effort." At best, institutional evaluation activities should reinforce and be a part of an institution's on-going life cycle. In this manner, evaluation can become an integral part of institutional renewal and planned change.

Finally, the issue of ownership also touches on the matter of mulipple accreditation and evaluation requirements. In the United States, Kells (1980a) estimated that between 45 and 60 accrediting agencies operate in the field of postsecondary education. (How many function in the Canadian college systems and for what purposes is generally not known.) The lack of coordination and cooperation among agencies at the inter-face with the institutions needs to be addressed. Similarly, efforts should be made to make evaluation reports also satisfy provincial and national data requirements. A considerable duplication of effort is required when data compiled for evaluation reports can only be used internally. Harcleroad (1980) proposed the preparation of two separate reports - a short form for public distribution and a long form for the board of trustees as a basis for institutional planning. Evaluation reports should be available to more than an single audience.

CONCLUSION

Will institutional evaluation come to Canada? Actually, it's already here. Everyone and every institution evaluates all of the time in one way or another. The question is rather about the adoption of a systematic approach to evaluation within the postsecondary sector of education.

I have suggested that issues of authority for establishing an evaluation system, purposes for undertaking evaluation, procedural matters, and the ownership of results must be addressed before adopting an evaluation system. A review of recent literature and experience elsewhere suggests greatest success in a system characterized by institutional authority in establishing the system of evaluation, improvement and renewal as its primary purpose, multiple and on-going data collection and validation procedures, and openness and trust in the shared ownership of its results. Institutional evaluation can play a significant role in the continuous development of Canada's colleges. It is in all of our interests to ensure that it does.

REFERENCES

Arns, R.G. and W. Poland. "The Role of Program Review in Academic and Fiscal Planning" in Sidney S. Micek (Ed.) Integrating Academic Planning and Budgeting in a Rapidly Changing Environment. Boulder: NCHEMS, 1980.

British Columbia Colleges and Institutes. Manual for Institutional Evaluation: Standards and Guide for Self-Study. 1979.

Dressel, Paul L. "Accreditation and Institutional Self-Study." North Central Association Quarterly 46 (Fall, 1971) 277-287.

_____. Handbook of Academic Evaluation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976.

Fisher, Grant "Institutional Renewal at Camosun." Journal of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges 3:3 (Autumn, 1979) 41-60.

Fraser, Bruce. "Educational Program Planning in British Columbia: The Context for Institutional Renewal." Journal of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges 3:3 (Autumn, 1979) 29-40.

Gardner, John, W. Self-Renewal:The Individual and the Innovative Society. New York: Harper and Row, 1964.

Harcleroad, Fred. F. Accreditation: History, Process and Problems. Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1980.

Kells, Herbert, R. "An Alternative Model for Self-Study in Higher Education." North Central Association Quarterly 52 (Fall, 1977) 341-346.

_____. Institutional Accreditation: New Forms of Self-Study." Educational Record 53 (Spring, 1972) 143-148.

_____. "Profileration and Agency Effectivness in Accreditation: An Institutional Bill of Rights." Current Issues in Higher Education 2:2 (September 10, 1980a) 19-26.

_____. Self-Study Process: A Guide for Postsecondary Institutions. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1980b.

_____. "The Reform of Regional Accreditation Agencies." Educational Record 57 (Winter, 1976) 24-28.

Kells, H.R. and R. Kirkwood. "Institutional Self-Evaluation Processes."Educational Record 60 (Winter, 1979) 25-45.

King, Alan J.C. "CAPRI: An Institutional Self-Evaluation System." Journal of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges 3:3 (Autumn, 1979), 141-158.

Konrad, A.G. and J.M. Small. "Institutional Renewal: A Planning Mechanism for the 1980s." Journal of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges 3:3 (Autumn, 1979) 1-12.

Macpherson Colin, R. "Validity and Cost of Self-Study in Accreditation of Medical Laboratory Science Educational Programs." Journal of Higher Education. 50 (March/April, 1979) 211-218.

Millard, Richard. "Accreditation and the Challenges of the 80's." A paper presented at the American Association for Higher Education, Washington, D.C.: March 6, 1981.

Miller, Richard I. "Appraising Institutional Performance" in P. Jedamis and M.W. Peterson et al. Improving Academic Management, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980.

____. The Assessment of College Performance. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979.

Romine, S. A. "Accreditation and the New Accountability in Higher Education." North Central Association Quarterly 46 (Fall, 1971) 257-263.

Troutt, William E. "Regional Accreditation Evaluative Criteria and Quality Assurance." Journal of Higher Education 50 (March/April, 1979) 199-210.

Young, Kenneth E. "New Pressures on Accreditation." Journal of Higher Education. 50 (March/April, 1979) 132-144.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
8118 Math-Sciences Building
University of California
Los Angeles, California 90024

OCT 21 1983